



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

IN MEMORIAM : JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY

AN ADDRESS DELIVERED AT THE RILEY BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

BY GEORGE HARVEY

FOREWORD BY JOE MITCHELL CHAPPLE

SHORTLY after the 1915 birthday festivities of James Whitcomb Riley at Indianapolis, it was my privilege to visit Riley at his home on Lockerbie Street. In his aftermath comment concerning the happy event, his heart seemed to overflow with gratitude toward those who had been "so kind" to him. He was especially appreciative of the tribute paid to him in the address delivered at the celebration by Colonel George Harvey, and he said to me:

"You know, it was so strange that a man whom I had seen so little, personally, should analyze my work so profoundly. I do not think I deserved it, but I am none the less grateful. It makes every day of my life now seem like a pleasant dream. It just seems as if the strength was given me to enjoy to the fullest that glorious birthday."

After the publication of Colonel Harvey's tribute in my magazine, I received the following letter from the poet:

MIAMI, FLORIDA, January 15, 1916.

JOE MITCHELL CHAPPLE:

Your magazine for January came last night, and I have read the Birthday Party article of yours over and over again, with a fresher interest and a deeper sense of gratitude to you and your kind heart.

While your generous comments I can but think far in excess of my deserving, I find it no less pleasant to accept, and am and ever will be your ever thankful friend.

In like measure I am beholden to the kindly offices and eloquence of Colonel Harvey. Truly a masterly tribute, from genesis to ulti-

mate finish; and how I shall be able ever to adequately thank either him or you is quite beyond my conjecture.

Most gratefully and faithfully your friend,

JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY.

The readers of THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW will, I know, welcome the opportunity of reading the following reprint of Colonel Harvey's tribute.

JOE MITCHELL CHAPPLE.

Why is James Whitcomb Riley?

One of the clearest proofs of the Scriptural declaration that the ways of the Lord passeth understanding is to be found in the wonder which we all feel from time to time that so many of our acquaintances should have been created at all. Incidentally, it is a safe assumption that they too suffer like bewilderment respecting our own superior selves. But the speculation is always interesting, and indulgence in it for a few moments tonight may not be destitute of profit. In any case, it possesses the merit of beginning at the foundation and building or reasoning upward. We all know why Mr. Fairbanks is, and Mr. Beveridge and Senator Kern and Governor Ralston, because they have been unable upon occasion to prevent their friends from enlightening us.

But why is James Whitcomb Riley? That is the question. So far as nomenclature is concerned, I can deduce the "Riley" from certain Celtic whimsicalities that I have read, and I infer that the "James Whitcomb" has to do with the distinguished statesman whose statue I saw today in the public square. But we must go deeper than that. What is his genesis as an artist, as a genius, and, as I have heard him depicted, as the only unsophisticated voter in Indiana?

Is it environment? Possibly, in part. Primarily, all countries comprised broadly three distinct regions—a maritime region, an agricultural region and a pastoral region—and the characteristics of a people are determined usually by the requirements of their location. The resident of the belt along the shore, pursuing the line of least resistance in seeking sustenance, becomes a fisherman, and that occupation being notably precarious, he grows to be hardy, resolute, bold, disdainful of danger. The shepherd of the hills, too, being charged with the protection of his flock, acquires a warring disposition and, breathing an atmosphere of loneli-

ness, grows moody and imaginative. Men's chivalry and inspiration are associated traditionally with the highlands, as by the imagery of the Jews, whose first law-giver received divine tuition from the mountain-top, by the Greeks whose Zeus ruled from Olympus, by the German barons and by the Scottish chiefs.

It is the inhabitant of the plains who becomes tranquil and thoughtful, a lover of peace, to whom the welfare of family, of neighbors, and of friends is of first consideration. So it is that, in our own country, despite the vaunted influences of our great cities and the restiveness among our hills, the seat of real power and of truest Americanism is the vast plain stretching from the Alleghanies to the Rocky Mountains. And so it may be that the songs of Riley are attuned, in a measure, by mere propinquity and usualness, to the joyous notes of the robin rather than to the shrill cries of the eagle and the gull.

But environment only moulds; it cannot make; no more than evolution, which even as depicted by Darwin and Spencer is nothing else than development of a force, whose origin cannot be determined by human reason. What that force is, whether it is of nature or of divinity, is a moot question, but there can be no doubt of one thing: that is, that there lives in every normal human nature a divine quality which takes the form of hunger to create—not merely to achieve, but to originate, to bring into actual being. Undoubtedly it is to that impulse struggling, helplessly in all seeming, but irresistibly, in the breast of the little Hoosier lad, that you owe the honor tonight of claiming as your own, not only the best beloved of poets, but the only one now living who is in truth unique.

I say unique, because I know of none living and can think of none dead with whom comparison, in the accepted sense of the term, can be made with any sense of surety. Literary achievement rests upon compelled recognition of one of three bases: craftsmanship, talent, or a gift. Each possesses its own field and makes its own appeal; seldom is one combined with another. To avert conceivable charges of invidiousness from among the living intellectuals, notably in a community so highly cultivated as this, we may instance Addison as at least eminently the master of his craft, and Mark Twain as no less surely the mind of talent. You would not think of classifying Riley with either in any particular or

from any viewpoint. He has been compared recently by a competent critic with Whittier, and in some respects the parallel seems to be warranted. To each was accorded the power of interpreting with striking fidelity the thoughts and feelings of his own people. Upon both was bestowed that rarest and most precious of inheritances—the gift, the gift that comes straightway from God. But there the parallel ends. Whittier's insight was distinctively spiritual. Riley's understanding, although no less crystal-like in its purity, is of the emotions. Whittier's was the Puritan God—a blending of perfection and austerity. Riley's is the God of the plains—generous, kindly, considerate, sympathetic; if not divinely human, at least humanly divine. Whittier's appeal was to the cultivated spirit. Riley's is to the very nature of the being. As we of New England revered our finest of poets from a distance, so with a like fittingness may you well, as you are doing tonight, take yours to your hearts in love and tenderness.

It is good that this memorable, this unprecedented tribute should be paid. It is good for you. It is good for us from afar whom you have permitted to join in glad recognition. It is good for the State to show that a prophet may not be without honor in his own country. It is good for the Nation, particularly at this time, when, so it seems to me, we should, above all things, hold America and Americans first in our thoughts.

And, believe me, it is good for Riley. I can think of but one thing better—but one gathering more harmonious with so beautiful a purpose. My imagination pictures a vast stadium fashioned by Nature upon the face of the Earth—a mighty bowl covered with greenest sward, stretching up to the rim as far as the eye can see and peopled with countless thousands of little children with faces radiating undying gratitude and everlasting joy. And as a preliminary of this celebration I would have enacted a tragedy—yes, sir, a literary tragedy. I would have the bigger boys emerge from the grove of trees at one side with the Gobble-uns captured and in chains. And I would have them drag the Gobble-uns through the multitude of shrieking boys and cheering girls and delighted tots barely from the cradle to the far end of the great amphitheatre and drown them—yes, sir, drown those Gobble-uns, drown 'em dead, dead, dead in the old swimmin' hole. And then I would have the myriad of sturdy lads and

little women in their prettiest frocks—the myriad not merely of this day but of countless generations yet to come, greater in number than the mind can comprehend—take their places on the grassy slopes of the great bowl and stand in perfect silence till a trapdoor at the bottom should be lifted and from the cavity should emerge the figure of their beloved. And at a given signal the wonderful orchestra of millions of robins should burst into song and the myriads of children should wave a salute such as would fetch the tears a-streaming down the face of him whom we honor tonight—such a tribute, my friends, as no poet and no man has ever won before in the whole history of the world which he has made so happy.

For myself, in closing, but a word of sincere gratitude for being permitted to come here and share with you the joy of this occasion. I have but one hope in mind. It is that when the time shall come for me to leave this very good world for one that may be better or may be worse, I may feel that it will not be taken amiss if I turn my fading eyes towards Lockerbie Street and murmur softly, but in all the tenderness of great affection, those classic words:

“ Well, good-bye, Jim:
Take keer of yourse’f! ”

GEORGE HARVEY.